



## When Newark Was Younger

## Country Fairs

**E**ACH Spring the New Jersey Council, public relations agency of the Department of Conservation and Economic Development, distributes the New Jersey State Date Book. Those who have learned that this booklet may be had for the asking, have been interested to find out that there are still plenty of county fairs in New Jersey, as well as the State Fair in Trenton.

Newarkers who have grown up since the turn of the century may not recall that for many years we had a famous fair just outside this city. The Waverly Fair was held for the last time on the ground now occupied by Weequahic Park 50 years ago, in September, 1899. That year the Essex County Park Commission bought the land.

The Waverly Fairs were held there annually over a period of more than 30 years, beginning in the Fall of 1867.

Waverly is not often heard of in Newark nowadays, except as the name of a telephone exchange, and a freight station of the Pennsylvania Railroad. We are more apt to speak of the Weequahic section, or even the old Lyons Farms neighborhood. The name "Waverly" was given to the section by Mary Mapes Dodge, well known to us as the author of "Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates," and editor for many years of St. Nicholas Magazine. She was a lover of Scott's Waverley Novels, and others took up from her the name she adopted for the locality where she lived. Over the years the second "e" in Waverly has

been dropped. When Mrs. Dodge lived there the section was part of Clinton Township, not coming into Newark until 1900.

**T**HOUGH Mrs. Dodge's father, Professor James J. Mapes, died in January, 1866, the year before the Waverly Fairs began, he had much to do with their development. Professor Mapes was a chemist, an inventor, and one of the founders of the National Agricultural Society. His chemistry led him to a study of soil fertility. To convince other agriculturists of the practical value of his theories he acquired in 1847 a badly run down farm of 30 acres along the upper road from Newark to Elizabeth.

Scientific plowing, and experiments in fruit culture

brought the farm to a high degree of productivity. In 1857 Professor Mapes began opening his farm to visitors every Saturday, exhibiting all sorts of new and improved farm tools, some of them his own inventions. His magazine, "Working Farmer," reported the tremendous productivity of his land, augmented, by 1859, to 121 acres.

With Professor Mapes was closely associated Patrick T. Quinn, a Newarker whose life is a veritable Horatio Alger story. Born in Langford, Ireland, in 1838, he came to America with his parents at the age of 10 and became errand boy for Professor Mapes. Laboring on the farm all day, his industry and intelligence impressed Mapes, who began to teach him in the evenings. At 16 he was sent to the Rev.

Mr. Pingry's boarding school in Roseville. At 18 he became Professor Mapes' farm superintendent, later associate editor of "Working Farmer," and instructor in a course on scientific and practical agriculture established on the farm. For 14 years he was secretary of the State Agricultural Society, the organization which developed the fair grounds at Waverly, and conducted the annual fairs. Newarkers may remember Mr. Quinn best as secretary of the Board of Trade, and comptroller of the city for several years. After Professor Mapes' death he became the owner of the Mapes farm.

**N**EWARK had known agricultural fairs before the grounds at Waverly were developed. The year after the New Jersey State Agricultural Society was organized in Camden, in August, 1854, the society sponsored a public competitive trial of mowing machines on the farm of Obadiah Meeker on the Elizabethtown road near Newark. Farmers gathered from all over the state to witness the trials and see the prizes awarded. The first real agricultural fair was held in Camden in the Fall of 1855 and in 1856 Newark offered \$3,000 to attract the fair here.

This 1856 fair was attended by 50,000 people. It was held on 20 acres of land loaned by Isaac Crane on the old Bloomfield road east of Ridge street. A cattle ring, a grand stand for 5,000 persons, a half-mile track (for trotting horses) and seven canvas tents were made ready for the four-day exhibition. The society passed a resolution forbidding "the sale of ardent spirits on the ground occupied by the Fair." Premiums worth over \$4,000 attracted

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Leslie's caption for this illustration read: "During the fair there was a very spirited trial of steeds which was a source of much entertainment. The ladies

took an active part and they were beautiful to behold in their gay and lively costumes." The four-day show of the State Agricultural Society drew 50,000 people.



## Farm shows in city went out with 19th Century; reached peak with Waverly Fair on Weequahic site

BY MIRIAM STUDLEY

more than 1,100 exhibits, including farm animals, farm implements, fancy work, hardware, silverware and musical instruments. For the spectators there were a plowing match, riding tests, and a fire engine trial—with speeches as a matter of course.

A SOCIETY was organized in 1857 for a permanent home for the New Jersey State Agricultural Society. Judge David Naar of Trenton strongly urged this in his magazine, "New Jersey Farmer," as did Professor Mapes in "Working Farmer." In 1866 the 30-acre tract at Waverly Station, near Newark, was bought, being paid for by the sale of shares in the society at \$25 each. Old maps show the fair grounds on the lower road to Elizabeth, along what is now the east side of Weequahic Lake, which was then only in the planning stage. The Waverly station on the Pennsylvania Railroad took care of the transportation of horses, implements and other bulky exhibits.

An association called the Weequahic (sic) Lake Association made elaborate plans for a large park, which failed to materialize. At the fair ground was established the office of the society where information and statistics on agricultural matters were collected and distributed throughout the year. Floral exhibitions, strawberry shows and trials of mowers and sprays were held in early summer. It must be remembered that the strawberry is brought to a high degree of excellence hereabouts, Seth Ayden being responsible for a very large and perfect Elton Strawberry.

In the great fairs held at Waverly each Fall fruits MARK SUNDAY NEWS

played an important part as did horticultural exhibits of all sorts. Mr. Quinn had much to do with this development, receiving in 1878 prizes for turnips, apples, pears, potatoes and strawberries. Appropriations were made by the state to provide premiums ranging from \$10 to \$200. One year there were over 5,000 entries in the exhibition. In the 1870's as many as 9,000 vehicles visited the fair grounds each year.

NATURALLY horses were of paramount importance at the Waverly Fair, so much so that the executive committee of the society warned in 1876 that racing become the chief attraction. Although a law had been in the New Jersey statutes since 1846 forbidding horse racing

Newark's first big fair as sketched for "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper" of September 27, 1856. Known as "The Great State Fair," it was held on land east of Branch Brook Park.

in the state, it had been amended in 1863 so as "not to apply to fairs and exhibitions held by and under the direction of any agricultural or other society" incorporated in the state. Before this, speed trials were held for horses, run singly against time. When the Waverly Fair was at the height of its prosperity, Thursday in the Fair Week was horse racing day and politicians from far and near came to watch the trotting and running horses and to strengthen political ties.

Any one who has never been to a country fair cannot imagine the immense array of objects spread out for the spectators. At the first fair the exhibits included a dairy churn with dog power, a self-rocking cradle and shower baths (a novelty in those days). For butter made by young girls under 18 there were prizes of silver cups and butter knives. Needlework was exhibited in great profusion, and hand made clothing and silk bonnets. All sorts of farm animals and poultry might be seen, dairy products and grain.

Of spectator sports there were many beside the horse races. A baseball game between the Amateur Club of Newark and the Harlem Club of Harlem took place in 1869, plowing matches were often held, and one year there was a velocipede trial. At the last fair in 1899 there were parachute leaps and a balloon ascension, high diving horses, and a man who dived from an 80-foot tower.

WHEN the Essex County Park Commission bought the Waverly Fair Grounds, the State Agricultural Society ceased to be active as a promoter of fairs. The society had accomplished much, and had been instrumental in establishing the Agricultural College, the State Board of Agricultural Experiment Station. It had aided in setting the Geological Survey on its feet.

Meanwhile a group of specialized societies had grown up, the State Horticultural Society, the various fruit growers associations, the State Poultry Society, the State Grange, the Cranberry Growers Association. These catered to the serious agricultural specialist, while the more casual attendants on agricultural meetings flocked to the county fairs, a number of which still exist. Other fair-goers visit the Interstate Fair at Trenton, which was in the '70s the site of the Fairs of the Central Agricultural Society of the State of New Jersey, a regional society which competed to some extent with the Waverly Fair.

Any one desiring to visit an agricultural fair in New Jersey this year has his choice of the following:

August 1-3 Cape May County 4 H Fair, Cape May City.

August 11-13, Sussex County Farm and Horse Show, Branchville.

August 17, Warren County Farmers' Fair, Harmony.

August 23-27, Morris County Fair South Beverwyck rd., Troy Hills.

September 3, 9, 10, Ocean County Farm Field Day, Lakewood.

September 5-10, Gloucester County Fair, Paulsboro.

September 20-24, Cumberland County Fair, Bridgeton.

September 25-October 3, N. J. State Fair, Trenton.

"Heigh-ho, Come to the Fair!"



By 1890, Waverly Fair Grounds (now part of Weequahic Park) was at the height of its prosperity and Thursday in the Fair Week became horse racing day. Here spectators take up vantage points with their horse and buggies at trackside.

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